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Mr Warren Christopher
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Department of State
2201 C Street
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U.S.A.

29 February 1980

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY _____ DATE 8 JUL 1982
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

Dear Mr Christopher,

We have read with concern press reports that the United States intends to provide the government of El Salvador with military mobile training teams, and seven million dollars in military equipment in response to political unrest there. As all security forces in El Salvador are combatting this unrest, and are in varying degrees implicated in abuses - including torture and summary executions - we believe that assistance proposals for these forces should be very carefully examined to determine whether they might encourage further violations of human rights.

Amnesty International policy on military or security assistance is based on decisions by our International Council, the organization's governing body. Whether to oppose such assistance is based on whether it "can be reasonably assumed" that it will be used by the recipient government "in the violation of human rights within Amnesty International's mandate" (1978 International Council, Resolution 9).

In this regard, it has been pointed out that provision by the United States of some US$ 200,000 worth of materials and training in November 1979 for the control of political demonstrations or riots, coincided with a massive loss of life when street demonstrations were attacked by authorities, a practice which continues in El Salvador.

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Indeed Monsignor Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, has maintained that United States assistance in "riot control" has contributed at least indirectly to a major increase in bloodshed (Washington Post, 19 February 1980).

Since December 1979, summary executions, arrests and disappearances in the countryside have been carried out on a large scale by uniformed security forces - the National Guard, Hacienda Guard and local Army detachments - working closely and openly with local personnel of the paramilitary organization ORDEN (Organización Democrática Nacional). If you wish, we will forward you detailed information from January and February 1980 on cases of summary execution, torture and "disappearance" - primarily in rural areas - in which both uniformed security forces and ORDEN are implicated.

Although nominally banned by the new Junta, ORDEN continues to function unhampered under the new name Frente Democrático Nacionalista. With a large armed membership, ORDEN is closely integrated with the conventional security forces. Its function parallel to conventional forces appears to have been initially outlined, without naming ORDEN, in the journal of the Salvadorean General Staff, Revista de la Escuela de Comando y Estado Mayor, of July-December 1970. In "La subversión comunista y las acciones guerilleras" General Carlos Guzmán Aguilar discussed the organization of local centres for "the gathering and dissemination of intelligence", and of irregular forces - "guerillas" - to act under Army command at the local level:

> "The information obtained through these centres through the collaboration of the canton military patrols and civilian personnel, would be disseminated to guerilla units operating in this jurisdiction..."

By putting into action "a counter-organization among the population", authorities can "annihilate" the guerilla opposition's "source of support and their source of information", according to General Guzmán.

According to all available information this paramilitary organization was organized to "fight terror with terror" using illegal techniques which might embarrass conventional forces. Under the name ORDEN it appears to assist lawful forces through clandestine "guerilla-style" operations.

Because of the significant role of ORDEN in security operations in El Salvador it would appear that its "dissolution" will remain meaningless without concrete actions - which might include the confiscation of arms and the arrest of members whose actions go beyond the law. This would have to be accompanied by an active general policy of condemnation of extralegal police actions by the military authorities.

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You may recall that the Report on the Situation of Human Rights in El Salvador of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (approved November 1978) called for the dissolution of ORDEN as a requisite for significant improvement in the human rights situation. Until this should occur you will understand our concern that assistance to lawful security forces may only with great difficulty be unconnected with these auxiliary forces operating wholely outside the rule of law.

As our information on the proposed United States assistance to El Salvador has come primarily from the press, we would very much appreciate receiving an official account of the scope and nature of the material and training proposed. We are especially interested in the projected role for Army mobile training teams, particularly as they may relate to the political unrest now predominant in El Salvador, and measures by security forces there. We would welcome any information you might provide that would indicate that military assistance by the United States at this moment might not serve to encourage or refine the acts of repression that are presently reported from El Salvador. We hope that you will take into account the urgency of this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Ennals
Secretary General

cc. Mr Clement J. Zablocki - House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Mr Frank Church - Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate
Ms Pat Derian - Deputy Secretary of State
Mr David Hinkley - Chairman, Amnesty International of the U.S.A.
Ms Stephanie Grant - Director, Amnesty International, Washington Office